

LAUGHARNE'S MARITIME PAST

At the start of the next century, January 1607 saw a great flood of the Bristol Channel, interpreted at the time as *God's Warning*ⁱ, and since as a possible *tsunami*. Some have ascribed to it the cause of changes to the landscape - for example the silting up and therefore decline of Laugharne as a portⁱⁱ. Evidence shows, however, as we shall see, that conversely Laugharne probably actually expanded to become a busy port from that time on and for centuries following that event. No doubt there was severe flooding of Laugharne at the time, and it is possible that huge quantities of sand were driven inshore along the seabed to contribute to the gradual expansion of the Carmarthen Bar, which did indeed contribute to the decline of shipping, but not until centuries later.

The rise of Laugharne as a significant port seems to have occurred in the seventeenth century and appears to have owed much to the Bevan family, especially to Zacharias 'Zachary' Bevan of Laugharne. Prior to that, in 1562 a report regarding the potential for Customs dues, made by Thomas Phaer constable of Cilgerran Castle, said that Laugharne and Llansteffan were *too poore townes upon the saide haven and their baylies and portrieffes are customers in their liberties and no order giving licence*ⁱⁱⁱ. Although shipping to and from other countries that would incur Customs dues may have been absent in the sixteenth century, the records show (table xx) that ships did call into Laugharne with merchandise from Bristol, and it is probable that there was local trade using lighters or barges.

Two boats, probably flat-bottomed lighters, that were known to have been used in the 17th century to transport freight up the Taf, were berthed at Laugharne.^{iv} They were known as the Thurloe and Bevans boats, respectively. Conrad Evans tells us that one owner, Thurloe, lived at Pantdwn and also farmed Foxhole and that both he and John Bevan, owner of the other boat, lived in Llanfihangel Abercowyn Parish, now incorporated with St Clears. Evans quotes charges made for deliveries by both boats in 1675/6 for bringing stones to Trefenty to construct three causeways – one by the church, one at Green lane and one simply called Llandilo - *for preservacion of the marsh from the sea*. Being made of stone they probably also created useful landing stages, and a later local farm sale document of 1685 emphasised its *every facility for water carriage*. Indeed one calculation suggests that inland water transport then was 12 times cheaper than that by road, whilst transport of goods by sea was 20 times cheaper.

So how can we account for the rise of merchant shipping during that century? Phaer's report also said of this area in the mid sixteenth century: *All this countrey is very bare of corne and be not able to lyve of their owne provision, for the most parte of their tillage is otes, and are served of wheate and malte out of the Forest of Dean and other parties*. Over the ensuing fifty years the application of lime to fields helped transform the agricultural scene. In 1603 George Owen recorded that 40 years of liming had transformed land in neighbouring Pembrokeshire previously under furze, ferns and heather to *fine and sweete grasse*^v. It led to the development of lime kilns especially along the water's edge because limestone and the coal to burn it were bulky cargoes most easily transported by water. It would seem then that growth of the lime-making industry is likely to have been accompanied by growth in local shipping, using lighters like the Thurloe and Bevans boats to transport coal and limestone, *as well as in carrying lime from creek to creek for transportation inland for use in agriculture*.^{vi} Moore-Colyer went

on to say that farmers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries acquired shares in boats, to export their farm products and import limestone and culm coal, and that is almost certainly what the Bevan family were doing from the early seventeenth century onwards.

One document shows that Thurloe had links with Zachariah Bevan, who became Laugharne's per-eminent merchant trader in the latter half of the 17th Century, and it is possible that John Bevan was related to Zachariah. Both Zachariah's grandfather, Thomas, and his father, Richard, were glovers by trade, and they must have been respected persons in Laugharne for each became Portreeve – Thomas in 1650 and Richard in 1662^{vii}. But Richard also possessed, at least the rental of, property that he eventually settled on Zachariah. It included three farms: Llansadwrn, Rhosgoch and Trefenty. As we have seen, Trefenty lay by the river Taf with those three causeways constructed in 1675/6 (soon after Zachariah's marriage, and perhaps by him) – probably to enable easier river trade as well as to stabilise the river bank. Certainly by the nineteenth century Trefenty had two, possibly three, limekilns to sweeten the grass of this predominantly dairy farm.^{viii} By the mid seventeenth century Trefenty belonged to the Plowden family who resided in Somerset and rented out the farms on their estate. Among the records of Zachary's trade is the sale of *grain, cloth, tobacco, raisins, figs, oranges and almonds, butter, cheese, soap and fish* to William Plowden, who inherited the estate, probably in 1677 when his father, Edmund, died.

Two of Zachary's brothers – James and Benjamin – were each masters of lighters, and other Bevans – John, Thomas David, William and Thomas – were owners of lighters. We cannot be certain that they, too, were related to Zachary, though it does seem probable. Perhaps Zachary himself began in the lighter trade for he kept a separate record of culm coal transshipments that has since been lost, but he was clearly ambitious and enterprising, developing a wide range of interests. On his marriage, aged just 18, he was given a Malthouse, 3 acres of land, his father-in-law's house and another house and garden. Three years later he acquired the lease for 31 years of Laugharne Castle and four years after that his father bestowed upon him *a fine capital house*. We can assume, too, that he was busy trading in those years but extant records only begin in 1689 when he purchased 43 bags of cut tobacco from the barque *Elinor and Jane* and in the following year that same ship returned with a cargo of salt from a 'captured ship' of uncertain flag! By then, too, Zachary was building a large warehouse by the river in Carmarthen – his business was expanding. Over the next decade his shipping interests continued to expand: trading especially to Irish ports including Wexford, Kinsale, and Dublin (with corn and coal); to the American states of Virginia (for tobacco) and New England and to Holland and Cheshire (for salt). A record made in May, 1700, refers to Zachary employing three local men – Richard Palmer, Steven Howell and Owen Pallmer – at Salthouse. Richard Baily, who had given Zachary property on his marriage, was designated then as *of the Marsh*. Perhaps his property was what is now known as Salthouse Farm, and that they were then extracting salt there for Zachary?

Zachary not only traded on boats he also purchased shares in several. At various times it would appear that he part-owned the *Carolina Merchant*, the *Tenby Merchant*, the *Factor*, the *Yarmouth*, the *Katherine*, the *Susannah*, the *Hopewell*, the *Beginning* and the *Ann and Sarah*. His trading brought shipping and goods to Laugharne to be used in trades there and sold in its shops. It also brought with it employment, both direct and indirect.

In 1692 the *Katherine*, a ship of between 80 and 100 tons, was in Laugharne for two and a half months undergoing an extensive refit which provided direct employment for between 40 and 50 individuals, including their accommodation in local houses.^{ix} But ships imported goods

for sale in Laugharne's shops and indeed it was mercers like Zachary who often purchased shares in ships. In 1670 John Rogers offered the following range of goods in his Laugharne shop, much, if not all, of it imported by ship:

blue linen, tapestry, painted calico, green serge, white coloured dimity, slozy Holland, Scotch cloth, housewife's cloth, bodices of coarse linen, school primers, grammars and other small books, white and brown sugar,, currants, raisins, and other fruits and spices, dyes, soap, tobacco, looking glasses, cups, lanterns, candles and wire candle-sticks, powder, starches, flax, door-locks, chest-locks, buttons, collars and belly-pieces, sole and upper leather, gun powder and shott, fishing twine, frying pans, earthenware, etc^x

Zachary's wealth, and with it his status, rose ever higher. In 1703 he became Portreeve of Laugharne and County Sheriff. A Rent Roll of 1706 listed his properties as follows: The red Lion, 2 houses and Quayside storehouse in Carmarthen; a house, two malthouses, eleven other houses, an orchard, 30 acres of wood, a shop and cellar with 8 large rooms above, all in Laugharne parish; and a new house by the church in Tenby. In 1712 he also had the right to heraldic arms, a sign of his rise to almost gentry status. His son, Arthur, benefitted from that rise. He had gone to university to train as a barrister and gained as his wife, Bridget, the wealthy daughter of the truly gentry Vaughan family. She became widely known as Madam Bevan.

The following table compiles records of boats with evidence of trading to or from Laugharne over the centuries.

Boat	Type	Base port	Cargo	Notes: Owner/Captain; ports
<i>The Mychaell</i>	Barque 18T	Laugharne		1566 John Palmer & David Allen: to Bristol
<i>Le Margett de Laugharne</i>				1567 from Bristol
-----	Ketch		Grain and beans	1690 Thomas Smith owner
<i>The Dove</i>		Aberthaw	Grain and beans	1690 John Spencer, master
<i>Speedwell</i>			corn	1700 Robert Chappell of Northam, Devon to deliver corn grain to Kinsale, Ireland
<i>Truelove</i>			corn	Nathaniel Nye, master, to take corn to Dublin and thence to Cheshire for salt to Tenby, Caldy Roads
<i>Katherine</i>	Pinque	Laugharne		Refittd in Laugharne
<i>Thurloe</i>	Barque	Laugharne		C17
<i>Bevan</i>	Barque	Laugharne		C17
<i>Assistance</i>	Barque			C17 Hy Butler & Hy Langston
<i>Samuel</i>	Barque			C17 Hy Butler & Hy Langston ^{xi}
<i>Mary Ann</i>	Sloop 19T	Laugharne		1791
<i>The Welcome</i>	Sloop	Laugharne		1801 - 21T in 1840

	34T			
<i>William Skyrme</i>	Sloop 65T	Laugharne		1810
<i>Emma Louisa Anna & Rebecca</i>	Sloop 28T	Laugharne		1823
<i>The Henry</i>		Laugharne		1850 David Griffiths: fortnightly to Bristol
<i>Friends Goodwill</i>	Sloop	Laugharne	coal	1814: sunk off St Ishmaels ^{xii}
<i>Emma Louisa Ann & Rebecca</i>	Sloop	Laugharne		1834 lost on Cefn Sands – appeal for a lifeboat station responded to in 7 months at Ferryside.
<i>Thomas & Mary</i>	6T			1846 Thomas Brown ^{xiii}
<i>The Lark</i>	9T	Laugharne		1846 David Griffiths to Bideford
<i>Peggy</i>	Sloop 14T			1846 David Morris
<i>The Lively</i>	25T	Laugharne		1850: William Hughes, master; Jos. G Mitford, Laugharne 1868: James Roberts (c 1826-1884), master, Bristol fortnightly – 1875 occasionally L. George Roberts
<i>The (Water) Witch</i>	Ketch	Laugharne, the Bach	Coal; stone from Wharley	Frank Brown: 1915 installed motor; 1916 coal f. Kidwelly
<i>The Nautilus</i>	Brig?	Laugharne	coal	John Thomas/Frank Brown 1915
<i>The Towy</i>			coal	
<i>The Matilda</i>	Barge	Laugharne by castle	coal	1917: George Brown 1st trip to Kidwelly for coal after 2 yrs repair
<i>The Flook</i>	Barge	Laugharne: Geo Roberts		George Roberts
<i>The Beatrice</i>		Laugharne: Geo Roberts		George Roberts
<i>The Lena</i>	smack	Laugharne: Geo Roberts By castle		Brown; moored Broken up in 1940s
<i>Sarah Brown</i>	smack			John T Brown. Blown ashore 1908

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- ⁱ James, T. (1991) Where Sea meets Land: The changing Carmarthenshire coastline, *Sir Gar: Studies in Carmarthenshire History*, Carmarthen: CAS, pp143-166, p 158
- ⁱⁱ Tremlett, G. (c 2008) *Laugharne Corporation*, p2
- ⁱⁱⁱ Phaer, T. Report on Harbours and customs administration of Wales, in *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* (1972) 24 (4) pp 485-503
- ^{iv} Evans, C. (1975) *The Story of a Parish*, Swansea, Private pp 16-17
- ^v Moore-Colyer, R.T. (1988) *Welsh Historical Review* 14 (1) *Of lime and men: aspects of the coastal trade in lime in South West Wales in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.* pp 54-77
- ^{vi} Williams, M. (1977) Life in seventeenth century Carmarthenshire. *Carmarthenshire Historian* XIV, pp5-19
- ^{vii} Tremlett, G. (c 2008) *Laugharne Corporation*, p36
- ^{viii} Jones, F. (1979) Trefenty: Some observations and reflections. *The Carmarthenshire Historian* Vol XVI pp 45-62
- ^{ix} Matthews, M. D. () Shipping and local enterprise in the early eighteenth century: evidence from south-west Wales, *The Journal of Transport History* 24 (2), p147
- ^x Williams, M. (1977) Life in seventeenth century Carmarthenshire. *Carmarthenshire Historian* XIV, pp5-19
- ^{xi} Williams, M.I. (1978) Carmarthenshire Maritime Trade in the C16 & C17 *Carmarthenshire Antiquary* XIV pp61-70
- ^{xii} James, H & T. (2003) Fish Weirs on the Taf, Twy and Gwendraeth estuaries, Carmarthenshire, *The Carmarthenshire Antiquary, Carmarthen: CAS*, 22-48, p 47n
- ^{xiii} Craig, R. (1985) Carmarthenshire Shipping in the Eighteen Forties, *Carmarthenshire Antiquary* XXI pp49-57